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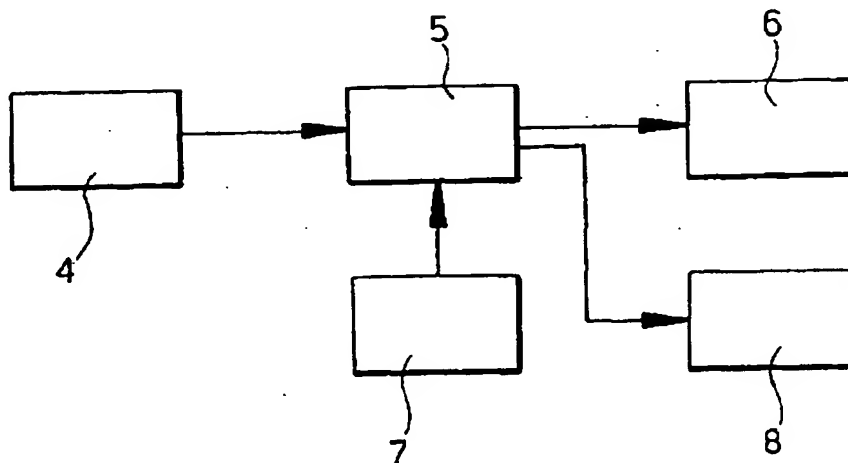
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(54) **A method and system for assisting the driver of a motor vehicle in a lane-change manoeuvre**

(57) Described herein are a method and a system for assisting the driver of a motor vehicle (A) in a lane-change manoeuvre, by signalling the emergency condition generated by the approach of another vehicle (D) along the same lane onto which the first motor vehicle is moving. In the external rear-view mirror of the first motor vehicle (A) there is integrated a CMOS optoelectronic sensor, the output signals of which are processed for

detecting the lateral distance between the motor vehicle (A) and the side (M) of the lane (L1) on which it is travelling. An alarm signal is generated in the case where there is simultaneously detected either a lateral approach of the first motor vehicle (A) to the side (M) of the lane (L1), or the approach of another motor vehicle (D) on the lane (L2) onto which the first motor vehicle (A) is moving.

FIG. 3



EP 1 312 506 A2

Description

[0001] The present invention relates to a method and a system for assisting the driver of a motor vehicle in a lane-change manoeuvre, by signalling the emergency condition generated by the approach of another motor vehicle along the same lane onto which the first motor vehicle is moving.

[0002] In recent years, there have already been proposed a large number of devices for signalling to a motor vehicle that is in front the approach of a motor vehicle that is following, during overtaking. Such devices tend to improve driving safety as compared to what can be achieved with traditional rear-view mirrors, which leave a part of the area behind the vehicle, the so-called "blind angle", out of the field of vision.

[0003] Devices of the type referred to above are, for example, illustrated in the European patent EP-B-0 443 185, in the European patent application EP-A-0 454 516, and in the European patent application EP-A-0 381 016. Such devices generally make use of sensor means of various types, in general of an active type, which detect the distance between the vehicle that is in front and the vehicle that is following. It has also already been proposed (EP-A-0 591 743) to use sensor means consisting of a passive opto-electrical sensor of the CCD type.

[0004] The purpose of the present invention is to improve further the performance of the known devices, enabling, in particular, a greater driving safety for the driver.

[0005] With a view to achieving this purpose, the subject of the invention is a method for assisting the driver of a motor vehicle in a lane-change manoeuvre, by signalling the emergency condition generated by the approach of another motor vehicle along the same lane onto which the first motor vehicle is shifting, characterized in that said method includes:

- providing passive digital opto-electronic sensor means (4), of the CMOS type, on the external rear-view mirror of the first motor vehicle,
- processing the signals emitted by said sensor means for detecting a set of quantities, among which also the position of the motor vehicle with respect to the side closest to the lane on which it is travelling,
- processing the signals emitted by said sensor means for detecting when a vehicle that is following is approaching on the lane adjacent to said side of the lane on which the first motor vehicle is travelling, and
- generating a an alarm signal when approach of the vehicle that is following is detected in concomitance with a lateral approach of the first vehicle towards the aforesaid adjacent lane.

[0006] According to a first embodiment, the aforesaid alarm signal comprises an optical signal on the dash-

board on board the motor vehicle or in the proximity of the external rear-view mirror, outside or inside the vehicle, but becomes also an acoustic signal when the electronic processing means detect the activation, by the driver, of the direction indicator of the motor vehicle, or else an excessive approach of the first vehicle to the edge of the lane, both phenomena being indices of the intention of the driver to change lane.

[0007] The sensor means typically consist of a digital telecamera, preferably a colour camera. The use of a colour telecamera improves the robustness of the signal and the capacity for operating correctly in all environmental conditions and for eliminating disturbances due to possible shadows of the vehicle itself or of other surrounding objects. Currently available technology of digital telecameras enables integration of said component in the glass of the external rear-view mirror of the motor vehicle. A further advantage deriving from the use of the digital telecamera lies in the fact that the aforesaid electronic processing means can be completely digital. The device can be connected to the on-board network (CAN/LIN) to simplify the wiring and increase the number of functions obtainable.

[0008] In addition to the functions outlined above, the electronic processing means can be arranged for comprising various other functions, such as signalling of other vehicles overtaking with the vehicle stationary, signalling of other vehicles overtaking at low speeds, i.e., lower than 25 km/h, the detection of vehicles that are approaching from behind at night, and automatic activation of the rear fog-lights in the event of poor visibility and their de-activation, again in the same conditions, following upon detection of vehicles that are following at a short distance.

[0009] Preferably, a further alarm signal is generated when an excessive approach to the edge of the lane is detected, in the absence of activation of the direction indicator, as warning of unintentional exit from the lane.

[0010] Of course, the subject of the invention is also the system that implements the method described above.

[0011] Further characteristics and advantages of the invention will emerge clearly from the ensuing description, with reference to the annexed drawings, which are provided purely by way of non-limiting example and in which:

- Figure 1 is a view from above of a road traversed by a motor vehicle equipped with the system according to the invention,
- Figure 2 is a schematic front view of an external rear-view mirror of a motor vehicle equipped with the sensor means forming part of the invention, and
- Figure 3 is a block diagram of the system according to the invention.

[0012] With reference to Figures 1 and 2, a motor vehicle A has an external rear-view mirror 2, in the reflect-

ing plate 3 of which there is incorporated an opto-electronic sensor consisting of a digital telecamera 4 made using CMOS technology. Alternatively, the telecamera 4 can be integrated in the body of the mirror or on its support fixed to the vehicle. The telecamera 4 has a field of vision defined by the area B in Figure 1, which increases considerably the driving safety, if it is taken into account that the field of vision of the rear-view mirror alone is the one indicated by the area C.

[0013] With reference to Figure 3, the signals emitted by the sensor 4 are sent to an electronic processing circuit 5, which sees to processing said signals in a completely digital way. The circuit 5 carries out a series of sensing operations in a way similar to what has already been obtained by known devices, such as for example the measurement of the distance between the vehicle A and a vehicle that is following D, during overtaking. However, according to the invention, the electronic processing means 5 are moreover provided for detecting the lateral distance existing between the motor vehicle A and the adjacent side M of the lane L1 on which the motor vehicle A is travelling.

[0014] The electronic processing means 5 are provided for activating an optical-alarm signaller 6, provided on the dashboard of the vehicle or in the proximity of the external rear-view mirror, outside or inside the vehicle, in the case where the processing means 5 detect approach of the motor vehicle A to the edge M of the lane L1 in concomitance with approach of a vehicle that is following D along the lane L2 onto which the motor vehicle A intends to shift its position. In the case where, in the aforesaid conditions, the electronic processing means 5 detect also the activation, by the driver, of the control member 7, which causes switching-on of the direction indicators, or else an excessive approach to the edge of the lane (both phenomena constituting definite signs of the intention of the driver to change lane), the electronic processing means 5 control a further alarm signaller 8, this time of an acoustic type.

[0015] Of course, the electronic processing means can be programmed in various ways. For example, it is possible to envisage that a first alarm signal will be generated when the lateral distance between the motor vehicle and the edge M of the lane drops below a predetermined value. Or else, it would be possible to envisage that said signal will be generated as soon as a lateral approach of the motor vehicle to the edge of the lane is detected, irrespective of the distance existing from said edge. Yet again, it would be possible to envisage that the aforesaid function will exist only in the case of an approach towards the left-hand side of the lane, or else towards either side.

[0016] As already referred to above, the use of a digital telecamera, made using CMOS technology, enables production of the device with smaller dimensions, reduction in costs, and use of completely digital processing devices.

[0017] Preferably, the digital telecamera is a colour

camera, in so far as the use of colour improves the robustness of the signal and the capacity for operating correctly in all environmental conditions, as well as eliminating disturbances due to possible shadows of the vehicle itself or of other surrounding objects. Given its contained overall dimensions, the sensor can be integrated directly in the glass of the rear-view mirror or, in any case, in the body of the mirror or in its supporting base.

[0018] Of course, without prejudice to the principle of the invention, the constructional details and the embodiments may be amply varied with respect to what is described and illustrated herein purely by way of example, without thereby departing from the scope of the present invention.

Claims

1. A method for assisting the driver of a motor vehicle in a lane-change manoeuvre, by signalling the emergency condition generated by the approach of another motor vehicle along the same lane onto which the first motor vehicle is moving, characterized in that said method includes:
 - providing passive digital opto-electronic sensor means (4), of the CMOS type, on the external rear-view mirror (2) of the first motor vehicle,
 - processing the signals emitted by said sensor means (4) for the position of the motor vehicle (A) with respect to the side (M) closest to the lane (L1) on which it is travelling,
 - processing the signals emitted by said sensor means (4) for detecting when a vehicle (D) that is following is approaching on the lane (L2) adjacent to said side (M) of the lane (L1) on which the first motor vehicle (A) is travelling, and
 - generating an alarm signal (6, 8) when approach of the vehicle (D) that is following in concomitance with a lateral approach of the first vehicle (A) towards the aforesaid adjacent lane (L2) is detected.
2. The method according to Claim 1, characterized in that the alarm signal is an optical signal on the dashboard on board the motor vehicle or in the proximity of the external rear-view mirror, outside or inside the vehicle.
3. The method according to Claim 2, characterized in that the alarm signal becomes an acoustic signal when an activation of the direction indicator by the driver, or an excessive closeness to the edge of the lane, is detected, both phenomena being interpreted as a definite sign of the intention of the driver to change lane.
4. The method according to Claim 3, characterized

in that a further alarm signal is generated when an excessive approach to the edge of the lane is detected, in the absence of activation of the direction indicator, as warning of unintentional exit from the lane.

5. A system for assisting the driver of a motor vehicle (A) in a lane-change manoeuvre, by signalling the emergency condition generated by the approach of another motor vehicle (D) along the same lane (L2) onto which the first motor vehicle (A) is moving, **characterized in that** said system includes:

- passive digital opto-electronic sensor means (4), of the CMOS type, provided on the external rear-view mirror (2) of the first motor vehicle (A), 15
- electronic processing means (5) for processing the signals emitted by said sensor means (4) with the aim of detecting the position of the motor vehicle with respect to the side (M) closest to the lane (L1) on which it is travelling, 20
- said electronic processing means (5) being designed for processing the signals emitted by said sensor means (4) for detecting when a motor vehicle that is following (D) is approaching on the lane (L2) adjacent to said side (M) of the lane (L1) on which the first motor vehicle (A) is travelling, and 25
- said electronic processing means being designed for generating an alarm signal when they detect an approach of the motor vehicle that is following (D) in concomitance with a lateral approach of the first motor vehicle (A) to said adjacent lane. 30 35

6. The system according to Claim 5, **characterized in that** said alarm signal is an optical signal on the dashboard on board the motor vehicle or in the proximity of the external rear-view mirror, outside or inside the vehicle . 40

7. The system according to Claim 5, **characterized in that** said alarm signal becomes also an acoustic signal when the electronic processing means (5) detect activation of the control member (7) of the direction indicator of the motor vehicle or an excessive closeness to the edge of the lane, both phenomena being interpreted as definite signs of the intention of the driver to change lane. 45 50

8. The system according to Claim 7, **characterized in that** a further alarm signal is generated when an excessive approach to the edge of the lane is detected, in the absence of activation of the direction indicator, as warning of unintentional exit from the lane. 55

9. The system according to Claim 5, **characterized in that** said sensor means consist of a digital telecamera (4).

10. The system according to Claim 9, **characterized in that** the aforesaid digital telecamera is a colour camera.

11. The system according to Claim 5, **characterized in that** the aforesaid processing means are of a completely digital type.

FIG. 1

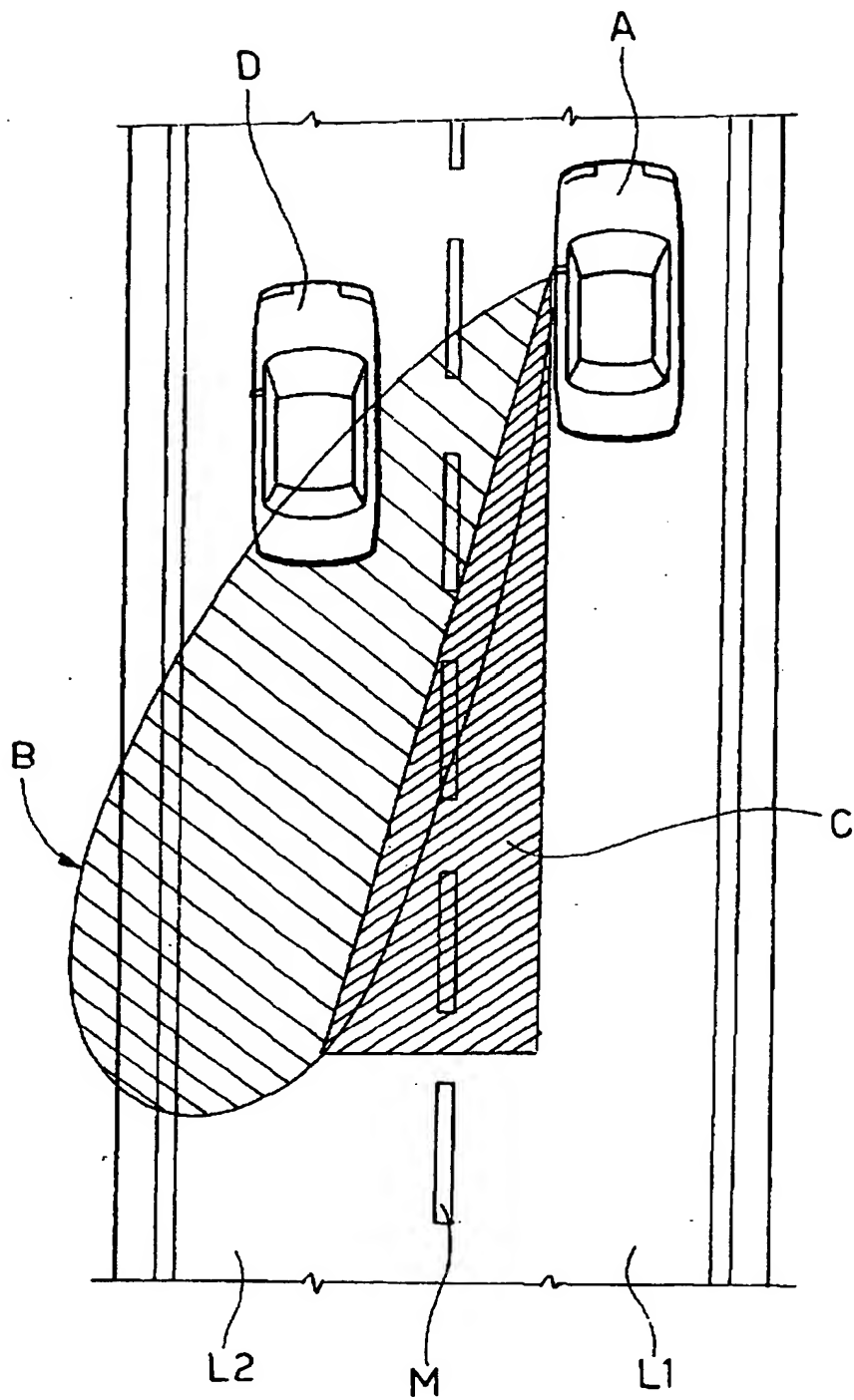


FIG. 2

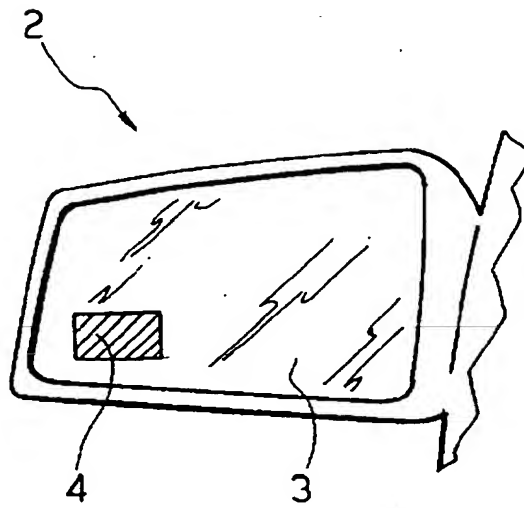
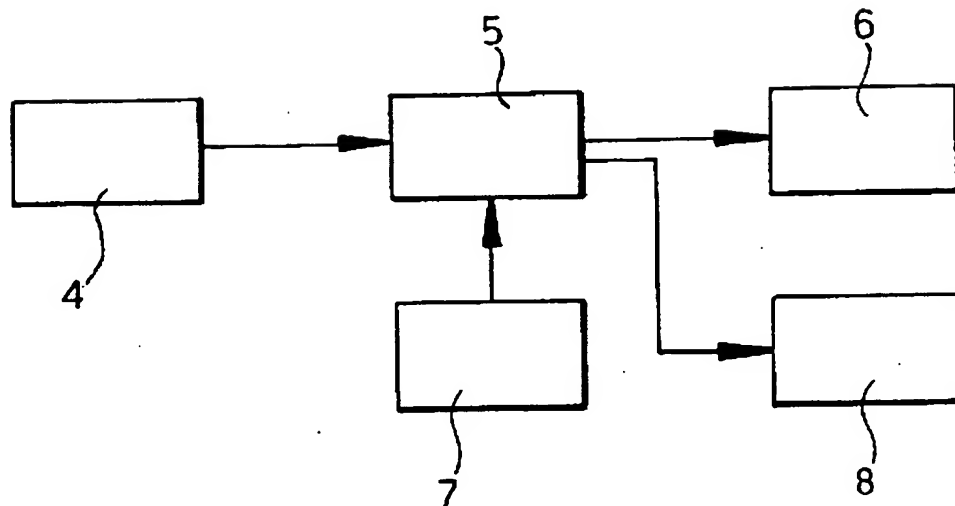


FIG. 3



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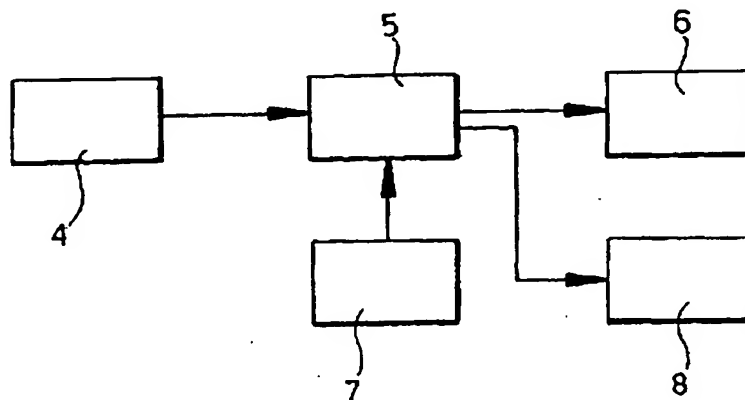
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FIG. 3



EP 1 312 506 A3



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EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT

Application Number
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Place of search Munich		Date of completion of the search 9 March 2004	Examiner Goltes, M
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The present search report has been drawn up for all claims			
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